

Report

Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail

■ 1.0 Site Description

The Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail is one of the 14 NPS-managed sites within the boundaries of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, which covers 7,000 acres and includes a major north-south access-controlled four-lane facility.

The 700-mile Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail runs parallel to the parkway from the Capital Beltway south to Theodore Roosevelt Island. Enabling legislation for the trail corridor was passed by Congress in 1983. Currently, the corridor comprises three official segments, 184.5-mile C & O Canal Towpath which winds through the District of Columbia, Maryland and West Virginia, the 17-mile Mount Vernon Trail, a paved recreational trail in northern Virginia, and the 75-mile Laurel Highlands Trail in Pennsylvania. A 10-mile stretch from Theodore Roosevelt Island near the Potomac River near Rosslyn, Virginia to the north paralleling the Potomac River has been added recently. Various local governments and non-profit organizations continue to develop and maintain trails within the designated corridor. Other sites discussed include:

- **The Women In Military Service For America Memorial** pays tribute to women who have served in the military. The memorial is not formally part of the cemetery, and is under the jurisdiction of the NPS.
- **The Great Falls Park** is a 800-acre recreation park which borders the Potomac River on the Maryland side.

The most significant visitation level among sites discussed is Arlington National Cemetery, estimated at seven million annually, with 40 funerals each day. No information on visitation levels was available for the Potomac Scenic Trail.

A number of transportation issues among the various sites have been identified:

- **For the Women in Military Site** – There is no parking available specifically designated to this site, with the exception of three sites designated for handicapped parking. This has created what Park management describes as a “nightmare.”
- **Arlington Cemetery** – There is an acute problem with the number of tour buses that congregate at the cemetery. The cemetery is the first tourist attraction to open in the area (at 8:00 a.m.). The larger problem of lack of tour bus parking in the region prevents operators from dropping off tourists and returning later. Instead they sit idling, aggravating internal circulation problems and detracting from the visitor’s experience. Tour bus parking is a regional issue that affects all the jurisdictions around the capital.

Numerous regional studies have cited the need for increased formal bus parking and attendant shuttles as necessary. The cemetery's master plan calls for the relocation of its visitor center to VA route 110. Tour buses will be encouraged to layover at a paid parking lot or to wait at the new visitor's center.

- **At the Great Falls Site** – Summer traffic backs up at entry gate, by as much as one mile.
- **On the GWMP** – Traffic volumes have increased steadily in the off-peak direction. Maintenance activities are now scheduled during off-peak hours (late evening to early morning) to prevent maintenance-induced traffic delays.
- **Generally** – Lack of tour bus parking in the District of Columbia and northern Virginia is repeatedly cited in studies with a regional focus as a major problem. The NPS-Central has recognized this problem as well as the impact the lack of tour bus parking has on its own operations.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Most park units have no private or public alternative transportation systems (ATS) services. The privately operated Tourmobile services Arlington Cemetery, Arlington House and Mount Vernon. The sites located on the Maryland side of the Park (Clara Barton house and Glen Echo Park) are served by infrequent county bus service. Additionally, the Cemetery is served by the Metrorail Orange Line.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

- **For the Potomac Heritage Trail** – There is some support for an extension of the Potomac Heritage Trail to tie into the Mount Vernon Trail in northern Virginia and extend northwards to the Capital Beltway, for which an additional two lanes and a bikeway expansion is under study. This represents a significant addition to trail connections in the metropolitan area. There are numerous topological and funding challenges that require careful study however.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Visitation levels for sites within the GWMP do not appear to warrant further ATS study at this time. There is a need for further study of traffic circulation, shuttle service and parking needs for the Women in the Military site, however. This latter need is directly related to circulation problems at the Arlington Cemetery, and should probably be addressed within that context.